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ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION

Sixteenth Ordinary Session

30 – 31 January 2011

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

Assembly/AU/15(XVI) Add.6

Original: English

**WOMEN AS A RESOURCE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN AFRICA**

(Item proposed by the Republic of South Africa)

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AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN AFRICA**

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I. Rationale

1. The continent has come a long way to emancipate women with a number of initiatives at the African Union (AU) level on women's involvement and participation and their role in the mainstream economic activities in all the sectors of human endeavour are key to Africa's sustainable development. Research indicates that women account for the majority of the poor in both urban and rural setting in Africa. Across the continent women have embarked on activities that seek to develop and empower them in order to play a meaningful role in society. These activities include combating the unacceptable increase in poverty of women, improving women's access to education and health services, addressing women's access to education and health services, addressing women's relationship to the environment, increasing the involvement of women in the peace processes and politics, advancing the legal and human rights of women, highlighting the special concerns of the girl-child, mainstreaming gender concerns with economic and development policy-making by collecting and analysing data along gender lines.

2. The Beijing conference in 1995 stressed the empowerment of women as one of the central development goals of the 21st century. It adopted a Platform for Action which called for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies and programmes, including development programmes. At the African Union level, the AU Gender Policy encapsulates decisions and Declarations of the Assembly and the global commitments on gender and women's empowerment and demonstrates the continued leadership of the African Union in advancing gender equality in the continent. These include the adoption of Article 4(L) of the Consultative Act of the African Union which enshrined the Party Principle, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, among other. The Gender Policy provides a mandate for the operationalization of Assembly commitments by AU organs which will be reviewed periodically. It also compliments ongoing implementation of these commitments at the Member States level and in Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

3. In the region, the September 1997 signing of a Gender Declaration by the leaders of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) at their meeting in Malawi and the signing of the Gender and Development Protocol in 2008 in Sandton, South Africa.

These are an indication of a step into the right direction and a positive work that can result from such interaction and consultation. The declaration commits Member States to eradicate gender inequalities in the region, mainstream gender in all SADC activities, create a structure of Ministers responsible for gender affairs and set up focal points in Member States as well as a gender unit in the SADC Secretariat. The same can be said at a continental perspective since in other Regional Economic Communities across the continent there are such efforts, initiatives and instruments in place.

4. Despite all these initiatives, the realities on the ground on a day to day basis show that women are still experiencing difficulties. While many countries have ratified the United Nations (UN) agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which guarantees women equal rights and protection from discrimination, these have not thus far informed policy-making or translated into better working conditions for women. As a result, this hampers Africa's development by excluding the perspectives, skills and dynamism of more than half of the population, women of Africa). Without meaningful commitment in the form of policy changes and the provision of resources to deal with the root causes of women's conditions, Africa cannot hope to see a breakthrough in its development and renewal.

5. Most Africa women remain confined to performing domestic tasks, such as caring for the children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. They provide the backbone of the rural economy in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Food production is the major activity of rural women and their responsibility and labour inputs often exceed those of men in most areas in Africa. With the current food security situation on the continent exacerbated by the effects of global warming and climate change women work tirelessly to provide food and livelihood for their families.

6. It is critically important to acknowledge the fact that the role of women in the development agenda is a missing link that can primarily enable the realization of real development. It is equally fundamental also for policy-makers to not only sign these international agreements but also implement them to form part of our national policies and constitutions and work with women to improve their positions and thereby accelerate Africa's development. A comprehensive approach must be taken by governments in conjunction with development agencies and women themselves to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women. African women are key to develop and attempts need to be made to develop their leadership in order to take the continental development forward. Women's leadership skills in their communities, groups and associations need to be afforded the necessary space and support to develop. Women's institutions and mechanisms for decision-making in community, market place and trades must be reorganized, and they should be utilized to increase

women's participation and decision-making power in society. The role of women in political and decision-making is critical.

7. The Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO) was established to fight for the emancipation of women, support liberation movements and refugees on the continent including the independence of African Countries. It strives to ensure socio-economic development particularly in member countries and internationally, as well as strengthening cooperation and solidarity between African women and women of the world. However, PAWO is facing numerous problems such as lack of funding. It is therefore imperative to support the resuscitation of the Pan-African Organization to reflect the commitment that the African leaders have towards it.

II. Elements of the decision being sought from the AU Summit

- It is proposed that AU Member States commit to funding the Regional Gender related programmes;
- A reiteration of mainstreaming gender in the National policies and programmes is also necessary;
- In order to guarantee implementation of the Gender programme, it is important to strengthen capacity of Gender Units at continental, regional and national levels;
- Member States and RECs should be urged to utilize maximally the Regional PAWO Offices based in their specific regions to enhance the contribution of women in the development of the continent.

2011-01-30

Women as a resource in sustainable development and economic growth in Africa (Item proposed by the Republic of South Africa)

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